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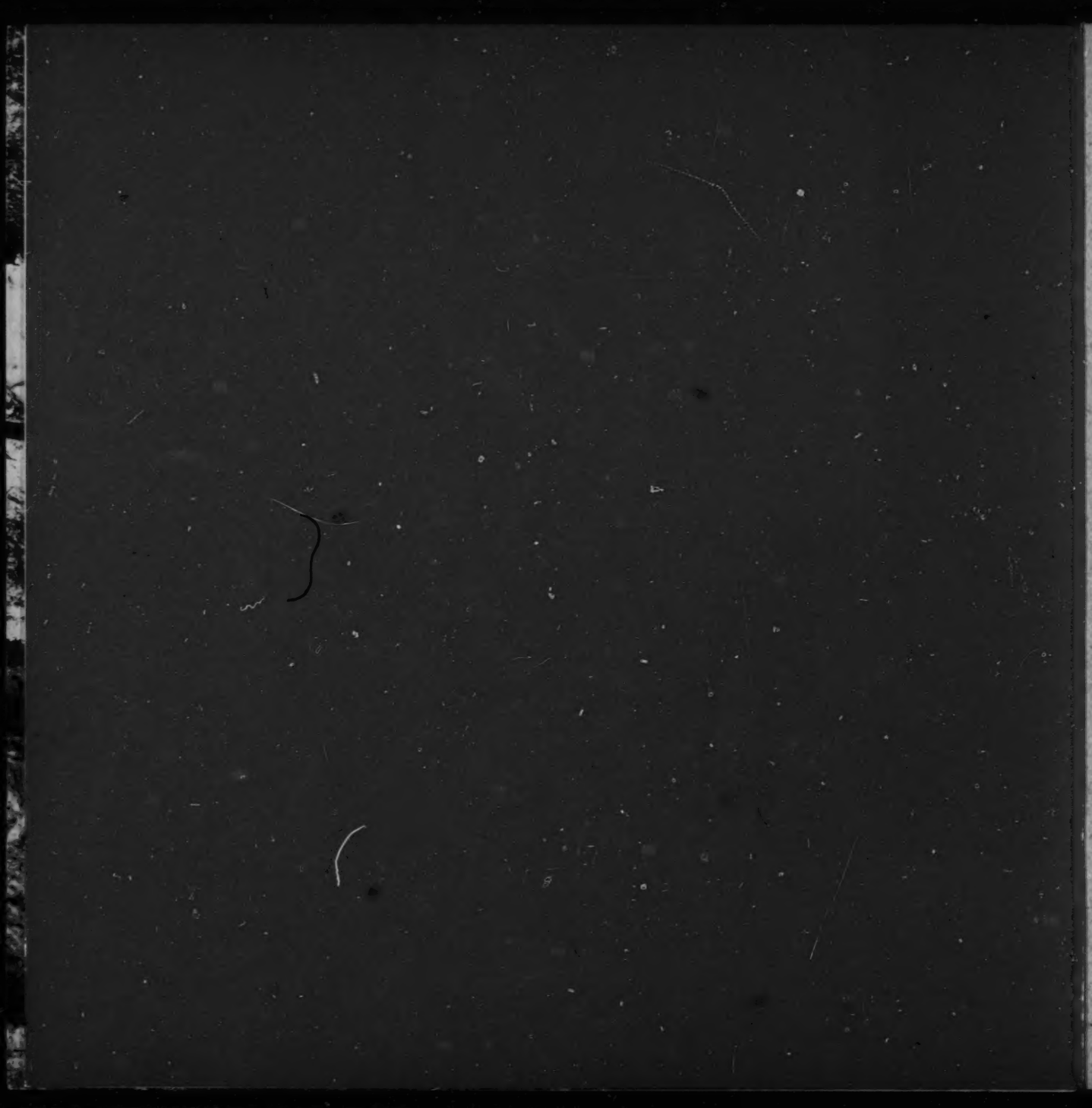


MARCEL BREUER



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An exhibition organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art
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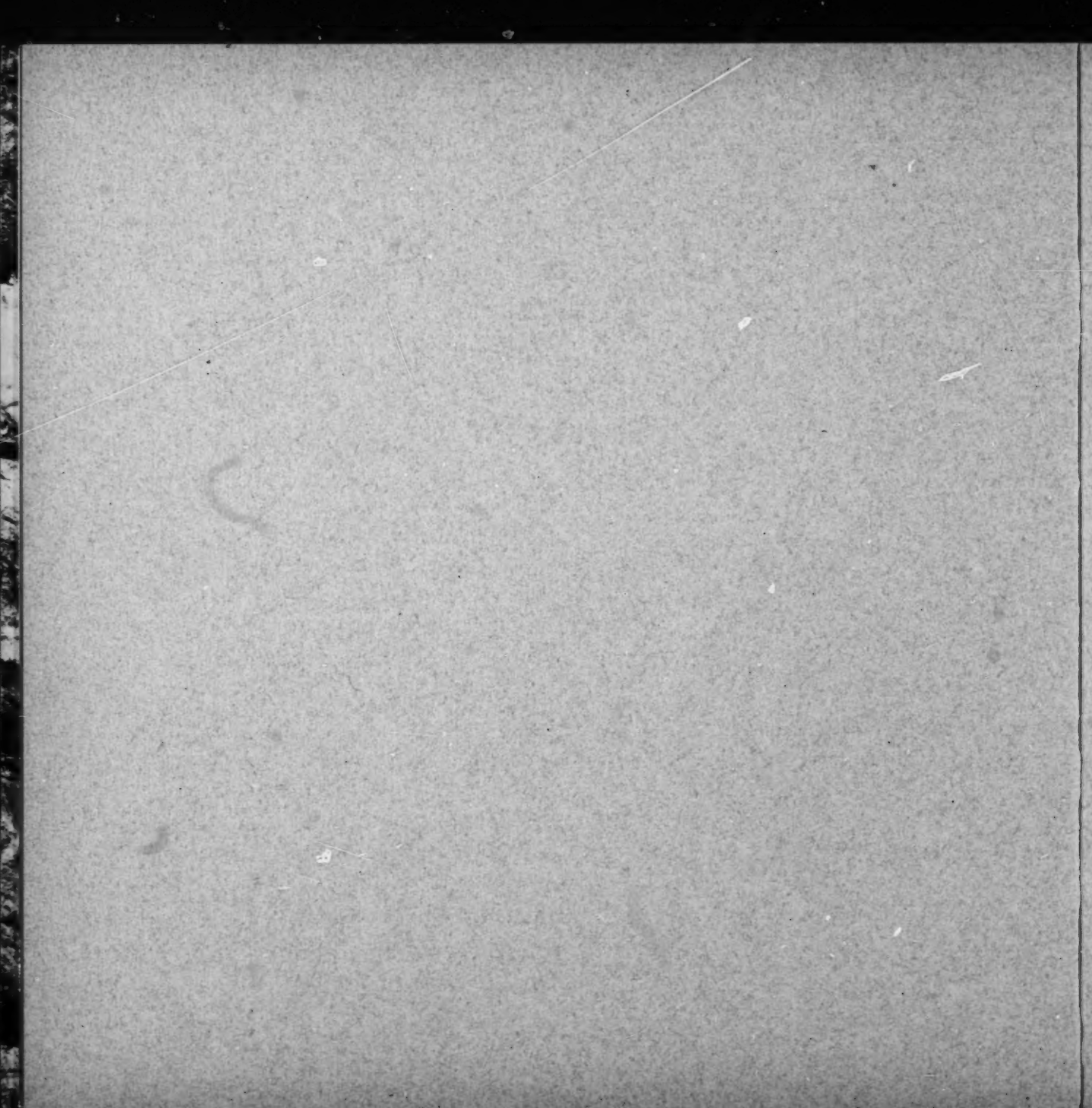
I don't feel a very strong impulse to set "human" (in the best sense of the word) against "formal". If "human" is considered identical with redwood all over the place, or if it is considered identical with imperfection and imprecision, I am against it; also, if it is considered identical with camouflaging architecture with planting, with nature, with romantic subsidies.

If "international style" is considered identical with mechanical and impersonal rigorism, down with international style. Anyway, the term is an unhappy one—just as unhappy as "functionalism".

"Human" it seems to me should mean more than just a pleasant tolerance of imperfection and an easygoingness as to precision of thinking, as to the quality of planning, as to consequences of materials, details, and construction.

God knows, I am all for informal living and for architecture in support of and as background for this, but we won't sidestep the instinct towards achievement—a human instinct indeed. The most contrasting elements of our nature should be brought to happiness at the same time, in the same work, and in the most definite way. The drive toward experiment is there, together with and in contrast to the warm joy of security at the fireplace. The crystallic quality of an unbroken white flat slab is there, together with and in contrast to the rough, "texture-y" quality of natural wood or broken stone. The perfection of construction and detail is there, together with and in contrast to simplicity, broadmindedness of form and use. The courage of conception is there, together with and in contrast to humble responsibility towards the client. The sensation of man-made space, geometry, and architecture is there, together with and in contrast to organic forms of nature and of man. "Sol y sombra," as the Spanish say; sun *and* shadow, not sun *or* shadow.

Marcel Breuer, at the Symposium "What is Happening to Modern Architecture?",
Museum of Modern Art, February 1948



Preface and Acknowledgments: When I mentioned to Lajko that this was the first presentation of a single architect's work in the history of the Metropolitan, he didn't seem to be the least impressed. When I indicated how interested the Museum was in his earliest work, he replied with a description of his latest project and the projects he was just initiating. When, in the course of our discussions, I expressed interest in an individual building, Lajko insisted it was the entire exhibition that was important—what he wanted to present was not only an individual project but to demonstrate “a direction of thinking”.

The Museum does not present the work of Marcel Breuer; in Breuer's own design of this exhibition, he presents himself.

I am indebted to Rolland Thompson for that first telephone call suggesting this show and for his continued support, and to Rufus Stillman, Lajko's friend, client and chess partner, for his contagious enthusiasm. Foremost among those within the Museum itself to whom I wish to express thanks for their constant interest and cooperation are Henry Geldzahler, Curator of Twentieth Century Art, and Sandra Stiles, my Administrative Assistant.

Arthur Rosenblatt, Vice Director for Architecture and Planning, Guest Curator

**THE ARCHITECT:
WOLF VON ECKARDT**

You can't pin a label on Marcel Breuer, one of the foremost architects of our time, and most likely our foremost living architect.

Labels have been tried; of course. Breuer enrolled at the Bauhaus when, back in 1920, the school was one year old and he was eighteen. But that does not make him "a Bauhaus architect," if, indeed, there ever was such a thing. He grew up with the Bauhaus and the new architecture it helped shape; but he is more than "a pioneer of modern architecture."

He began on that new frontier, as it were. And although he was often forced to help defend it, he was never really caught up in the doctrines of pioneering as such. "After the oversimplifications of the battle cry," he once said, "there are human needs."

In its early, somewhat chaotic *Sturm und Drang* days in Weimar, the Bauhaus had little concern for human needs. What had attracted Breuer, and scores of other restless youngsters from all over Europe, was a simple leaflet, signed by Walter Gropius. It spelled out the program of the new state school, which had come out of a merger of a former Grand Ducal School of Fine Arts and the Grand Ducal Craft School, and to which a new department of architecture was to be added. This merger, a reunification of the arts and crafts, Gropius proclaimed, will "one day want to conceive and create the new building of the future . . . that will rise to heaven from the hands of millions of craftsmen as a crystal symbol of a new faith." On the cover of the leaflet, a woodcut by Lyonel Feininger depicted the symbol as a vaguely Gothic cathedral.

It was a time of turmoil and turnips in defeated Germany and a time of poverty and protest, groping and seeking, error and discovery, bitter doubt and flaming enlightenment at the Bauhaus. Every so often the early *Bauhausler* relieved the tension with capers and saturnalian costume parties. Johannes Itten invented his radical design course, "a big house-cleaning of the mind," he called it. Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky painted and developed their theories. Gerhard Marcks was in the ceramics workshop, Oskar Schlemmer experimented with stage and costume design and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy introduced "constructivism" into every area of design.

Young Breuer, of whom it was said that he slept in the bathtub of some den which he shared with two women, was busy in the carpentry shop, building Cubist wood sculptures that doubled as hellishly uncomfortable chairs and vice versa. But in all this enthusiastic new faith in the renewal of mankind, "mankind remained a pure abstraction," as Bruno Adler, one of the early Bauhaus students, put it later. Gropius talked of architecture, but confined the practice of it to his own, private studio. He preached science, but knew little about it.

Breuer sensed these discrepancies. He was born into the tide of the machine age in 1902 in Pecs, a provincial center of about 60,000 inhabitants near the Yugoslav border. His father was a doctor. He wanted to be a sculptor. That first took him—where else would a Hungarian lad go?—to the Vienna Academy of Art. But he instantly saw the anachronism of academism. "It lasted about thirty minutes," he insists.

But he chafed at the bits of Bauhaus theorizing, too. He was born the year before the airplane was invented, but he had flown in one before he rode in an automobile, and did both before he used a telephone. The new technology which Gropius saw as a menacing challenge was a natural matter of course to him. "Hard as I try," he told the others at the Bauhaus, "I see no chaos in our time. Just because a few painters do not know whether they should paint realistically or in the abstract, or whether they should



paint at all, does not mean chaos. Our needs seem clear—the possibilities limited only by us. The main thing is that we act whenever a need appears and use our strength to find an economic and coherent solution.”

The need Breuer saw was the need to accept and master the new technology. The solutions he sought were practical solutions to the practical problems of people. With the painter Georg Muche and his fellow Hungarians, Moholy-Nagy and Farkas Molnar, Breuer agitated for the long promised architecture courses (which Gropius considered premature), argued for less esoteric expression and more practical function, and helped push the school into the direction in which it finally excelled—industrial design. The term was then not yet used. But the Bauhaus approach to the design of factory-produced utensils and furnishings and, in the end, to the design of buildings and cities, has revolutionized, as Mies van der Rohe put it, “everything from the coffee cup to city planning” and had a profound influence on what Gropius called “the total man-made environment.”

But even in those days, Breuer challenged “the oversimplifications of the battle cry,” the blinding pomposity of gospel. “‘Art and technology—a new unity,’” he mocked the new Bauhaus slogan, “means art is wonderful, technology is wonderful, so the two together must be twice as wonderful. But that is not so. Art and technology may sometimes appear in similar form, so that, in the confusion, one may take them for the same thing. But they are different in origin and in the basic process of their creation.”

True, he said later, a house is, as LeCorbusier put it, “a machine for living in. But you don’t want to get greasy if you lean against the wall. You want to have something simpler, more elemental, more generous, and more human than a machine.” Yes, “form follows function,” Breuer also once said, “but not always.”

The first work of architecture the Bauhaus presented to the world at its first exhibition in 1923—three years before Gropius’ famous Bauhaus Building was built at Dessau—was designed by a painter, Georg Muche. It was a small experimental house; its three bedrooms, dining room and kitchen surrounded the living room, which was much like an atrium and had high ceilings with clerestory windows that peaked out over the rest of the roof. The house was built at Weimar’s Am Horn, at the edge of a park, not far from Goethe’s summer house. Breuer designed many of the furnishings for the “Haus am Horn,” which he built by hand in the carpentry shop and which caused more of a sensation at the time than the house itself. The kitchen, in particular, with its suspended cupboards and continuous work space on top of the lower cabinets, had a profound influence on the design of kitchen interiors today.

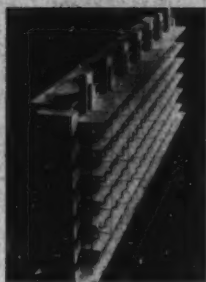
The following year, architecture courses or not, Breuer, responding to a contest held by the architectural journal, *Bauwelt*, came up with a design for a low-cost apartment building. Although he was only twenty-four years old at the time, it revealed a full-blown and truly amazing architectural talent. A narrow, seven-story vertical slab, the first of its kind, according to architectural historian Sigfried Giedion, contains duplex apartments, and is made livable, as well as handsomely articulated, by continuous garden terraces on each floor. The concept was soon adopted by leading architects all over Europe. Though never built, Breuer’s design strikes me as one of the few products of the Bauhaus at that time that still does not seem dated.

Another such triumph was Breuer’s tubular steel furniture, notably that great chair you still find today, handsome, comfortable, inevitably fitting, in many a living room



1) African chair, Marcel Breuer, 1921
2) Marcel Breuer in 1925
3) Cottage, Wellfleet, Mass., Marcel Breuer, 1946. Photo: Tamas Breuer





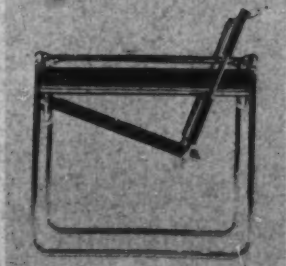
or office lounge. Breuer later called it the "Wassily Chair" in honor of his friend Wassily Kandinsky who owned two of them. Ironically, perhaps, this first "breakthrough" in the Bauhaus search for an artistically valid machine product, the first true, tangible Bauhaus product, was created outside the institutional ken of Gropius' school. Breuer designed, or you might say "invented," his tubular steel chairs, stools and tables as an extracurricular activity. What inspired him was his bicycle. If you can bend a tube into a handlebar, why can't you bend it into furniture? He soon found a steel bender to help him with the job, though the Mannesmann steel works, which must since have made a tidy sum on the idea, refused at first to make its tubing available "for such childish purposes."

The shiny furniture promised a fulfillment of both the social and aesthetic ambitions of the modern movement. Here was a light-weight, "functional" and handsome implement of the good life that could be inexpensively mass produced for the greater happiness and comfort of every working man. The simplest of Breuer's steel furniture designs, a folding chair, was, in fact, sold in pre-Hitler Germany for twenty-one Reichsmark and twenty pfennige, the price of a good pair of shoes. That the working man disdained it and preferred carved oak, and that Breuer's furniture, along with Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chair, has ended up in the executive offices of fancy corporations and the fancy living rooms of corporate executives, should give our designers something to think about. But that is another story. The aesthetic success is assured. The impeccable lines and seeming transparency of such furniture helped transform modern architecture into a modern culture. Unlike most early modern architecture, which was built by the old construction methods and merely *looked* technically advanced, Breuer's bent steel is, as he has said, "not only symbolic of our modern technology. It is actually modern technology itself."

Breuer's invention instantly inspired others to similar designs. LeCorbusier, whom Breuer first met in 1924, also designed a famous tubular steel chair. But he always acknowledged that Breuer was first.

When the Bauhaus moved to Dessau, Breuer, Herbert Bayer, Josef Albers, and three other students were appointed "masters" and took over workshops of their own. The school settled down in its new building. The architecture department finally got started. Some of the school's industrial designs brought the Bauhaus considerable income from industry. But the quarrels and tensions within the Bauhaus continued and so did the political attacks on the school which the Nazis, who were rapidly gaining power in Germany, called "a hotbed of cultural bolshevism." Gropius resigned in 1928, to be succeeded first by Hannes Meyer and then by Mies van der Rohe. Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer, and Breuer left the same year but for different reasons. Breuer took up private architectural practice in Berlin. But there was nothing much to build in those years of economic depression. After three years of struggle, he took to the road.

"I had never intended to stay in Germany," said Breuer recently, reviewing his career. There is a gleam of happy reminiscence in his eyes, as he recalls these *Wanderjahre* in the early 1930's. They took him first to Paris, where his acquaintance with LeCorbusier turned into a friendship which came to an abrupt end when Breuer, in 1952, was commissioned to design the UNESCO Building, a commission which LeCorbusier much coveted. Breuer had made no effort to compete for the UNESCO job. But the master was never very logical in his work or emotions and poor Breuer is



still sadly puzzled by the eccentric behavior of a man he greatly admired.

Paris, where he met Braque, Leger, Delauney, Ozenfant and the other painters, sculptors and camp followers of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, must have been a refreshing antidote to Weimar and Dessau. *L'Esprit Nouveau* also sought to reform the world by reforming art and architecture. The French word *esprit* translates the same as the German word *Geist*. Both mean "spirit." But in Germany they talked about "mankind." In France they talked about men (and women, no doubt) and their outlook, I suspect, was artistic rather than *weltanschaulich*. At any rate, the colors were brighter. And I should think all this had its influence on Breuer. It must have loosened him up. His work, though it continued precise and disciplined, became more exuberant. He seems to have been well received by the Parisian artists. He now has an office in Paris as well as New York.

He went on to Spain, North Africa and Greece, traveling by car, which he rigged up with a drawing board. He needed it for only two commissions: once for the Harnischmacher House in Wiesbaden, Germany, and the second time for the Doldertal Apartments in Zurich, Switzerland. Each building in its own way seems a blend of Bauhaus and *L'Esprit Nouveau*. The house, with daringly extended porches reaching out into the landscape, seems held up by tension alone. The apartments, built for Sigfried Giedion, reveal Breuer's skill in siting buildings, and their plans, says the architect and critic Peter Blake, "are more thoughtful about the ways families really live in apartments than the plans of any other architect at the time." Breuer gave meticulous attention to every detail of the buildings, among them a variety of sunshade devices. They shade all that glass modern architects used to consider essential for their modernity and foreshadow Breuer's later preoccupation with this problem. The Doldertal Apartments, reports Blake, who has visited them recently, are still in first rate condition.

The *Wanderjahre* ended in London, since Hitler had made it untenable to practice modern architecture (or any other creative endeavor) in Germany. Breuer's legacy to England is the Ganes Exhibition Pavilion in Bristol (with F. R. S. Yorke), where he first used his wonderful stone walls. He still felt it necessary, though, to apologize for this transgression from conventional, modern sleekness with the explanation that the stones were laid to precise drawings and a given geometry and were "not a grotto or part of a romantic anachronism." It was, I believe, his last apology for the emphatic use of contrast (glass vs. rough stone, in this case) which was to become a mark of Breuer's architecture.

Still more prophetic of the Breuer-to-come was his "Civic Center of the Future," an exhibition project commissioned by the British Cement and Concrete Association. It shows an orderly arrangement of complex forms that promised to the people who might live and work in these buildings and walk along them a refreshingly varied and stimulating experience, as exciting, almost, as a walk through the heart of Verona. What was refreshing was the contrast of this urban design to the oversimplification of LeCorbusier's *Ville Radieuse* with its boring freeways lined by identical skyscrapers, to say nothing of the devastating monotony of the town plans Ludwig Hilbersheimer had drawn up at the Bauhaus. Both, I hate to say, still have an insalubrious influence on American city planning today. In addition to Breuer's novel and human approach to the creation of an urban environment, his Civic Center scheme includes a number

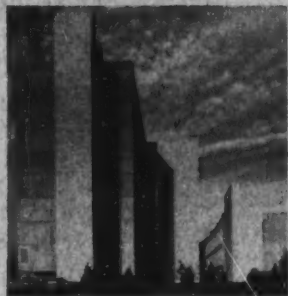


4) Model for a multi-story duplex apartment house. Marcel Breuer, 1923

5) Z.U.P. low-cost housing, Bayonne, France. Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gatje, 1963-1967. Photo: Yves Guillemaut

6) Clubchair, first tubular design. Marcel Breuer, 1925

7) Doldertal Apartments, Zurich, Switzerland. Marcel Breuer, Alfred and Emil Roth, 1934-1936



of ideas for building forms which must have grown in Breuer's mind during his wanderings away from the Bauhaus. He was soon to realize them in concrete. The most obvious of these are two double Y-shaped office buildings much like the ones he designed for UNESCO, IBM-France, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington, D.C. But you will find others, too, if you look closely at the photograph of the Civic Center model.

In 1937, Breuer arrived in the United States. The Dean of Architecture at Harvard, Joseph Hudnut, had decided it was time for a change in American architectural education and invited Walter Gropius to teach at Harvard. Gropius invited Breuer to join him.

Joseph Hudnut had been right; it was high time to find new directions in American architecture. It was at that time still dominated by *l'esprit ancien*, as it were, the tottering *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris. There was, to be sure, a timid show of modernity, considered somewhat eccentric, on the West Coast; white stucco houses with large picture windows and wide terraces, designed by Rudolf Schindler or Richard Neutra. But these early swallows were far from bringing a new spring. In the Midwest, there was Eliel Saarinen, not truly modern yet, but better, far better than "modernistic." He was a man with new concepts who built little, however. His influence on American design was as much through his buildings as through the Cranbrook Academy, near Detroit, where he taught Harry Weese, Charles Eames, Harry Bertoia, Edmund Bacon, Florence Knoll, to mention a few. Most histories of modern architecture omit Cranbrook because they are slanted by Giedion's European view of *Space, Time and Architecture*.

In the East there was William Lescaze, a solitary pioneer and—well, then there were the pictures of these intriguing Cubist boxes in the architectural magazines. They disturbed our American Beaux Arts architects enough to cause them to scrape off the half-columns and pediments and other ornamentation from their neo-neo-Classic temples and give us the bland mediocrity of New Deal architecture. The rest was mercantile classicism with hardly a thought of the new functions that cried out for new forms.

There was, of course, also Frank Lloyd Wright, that solitary genius. America eventually learned to admire, even to worship the man. But we were too busy talking about him to listen. What influence he had on the American cityscape came back to us via the Europeans—Breuer included. There was no Wrightean school, beyond the still busy cultists out in Taliesin.

Not all American Beaux Arts architecture was as bad, however, as the modernists made it out to be to make their point. John Russell Pope's National Gallery in Washington, for instance, is a splendid building, even as his Jefferson Memorial is an anachronistic confection, considering that it was not completed until 1943. And I shall be forever grateful that the much ridiculed Federal Triangle, begun in 1926, was not built in the self-consciously modern style of the time. But a few good buildings did not improve the drab architectural climate. At the time Gropius and Breuer arrived at Harvard and Mies van der Rohe and Moholy-Nagy arrived at Chicago, even liberals in this country considered it altogether proper that the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library at Hyde Park be built in a pastiche Georgian manner.

Breuer, who was not much older than his students, was the teacher of some 200 architects who helped make this country a world leader in the field. Among those most

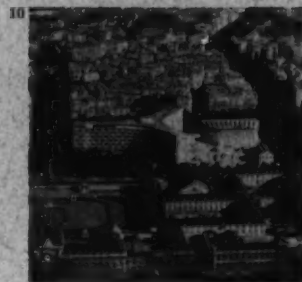
renowned today are I. M. Pei, Edward L. Barnes, L. Rado, Ulrich Franzen, Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph, John Johansen, Willo von Moltke, Eduardo Catalano, Eliot Noyes, Harry Seidler and others. What formed this new generation of modernists was not the new gospel from Dessau. It was the personality, if you will, the *personal* philosophy of this new teacher with his still heavily accented English who wandered among the drawing boards, never imposing himself or his style, or any style, quickly grasping what it was the student was struggling to do and then, in his joyous manner, inspiring him to do it more boldly, more directly—not one way, but in six different ways. Breuer, I am told, was impatient only with students who did not struggle, who did not have that best to bring out of them.

"Everybody realizes that a younger man is somewhat influenced by his teacher," Breuer told Paul Heyer, an architect and critic. "Yet, I impressed my students with the importance of making their own decisions. I wanted to encourage individual search and research by my teaching, in contrast to Mies, who showed his students: 'This is the corner solution, the brick solution, do it.' With all respect for Mies—who knew very well what he did and wanted, but was much too narrow—my philosophy was not, and is not, to develop a definitive style. If you do, you have already killed it. I am much more interested in the points of style that need further research and development. The development is the significant thing as it becomes the style of that moment."

They all pursued development, inventive divergence, the minute they left Harvard, and some of them pursued vain self-expression and originality for its own sake. It can be said, in fact, that the International Style was killed as soon as it entered Harvard, nor could Mies rescue it in Chicago. Mies remained a great, solitary artist, whose greatness is in no way impaired by his shoddy imitators. The death of the International Style need not be regretted, though it left in its wake much of the same eclectic chaos that so disturbed the modern pioneers about Victorian architecture. Breuer still says, as he did some fifty years ago at the Bauhaus: "Hard as I try, I see no chaos in our time." Paul Heyer, in his *Architects on Architecture*, quotes Breuer as saying now: "A great many tendencies are emphasized today: inventiveness, structure, plastic modulation, preoccupation with scale, and, regrettably, the all-is-permissible-to-the-genius tendency. This is due partly to the original emphasis of modern architecture on freedom from traditional precedents. The initial liberating process still has an active momentum; a fact that we should welcome in view of the tendency of many 'successful' modern architects to codify and formalize architecture into a rather tyrannical discipline that is less related to true progress, to visual and human needs."

And that is it. At the very moment when "a rather tyrannical discipline" might have been imposed at Harvard, Breuer initiated that "liberating process."

"Frank Lloyd Wright never turned us on," says Edward Larrabee Barnes, reminiscing recently about his student days at Harvard. "We had, of course, heard and read about the new *Weltanschauung* developed at the Bauhaus. But now we saw this new world. We saw it in Breuer's apartment at Cambridge. The walls were all white and there was the expected chromed furniture. But it was all bright and cheerful with primary color. There were paintings by Paul Klee and marvelous Hungarian peasant things and Japanese matting. There were many photographs of pretty girls and a lot of the things you now find at Design Research, but that we had never seen before. And that's what really hit us. That's what turned me around. I guess I had expected some-



8) "Civic Center of the Future" Exhibition model, London, Marcel Breuer, F.R.S. York, 1936

9) New York University, Technology II, Bronx Campus, N.Y. Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1967-1969. Photo: Ben Schnall

10) UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Marcel Breuer, P. L. Nervi and B. Zehrliuss, 1958-1958

11) St. John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn. Marcel Breuer; Hamilton P. Smith, associate, 1953-1961. Photo: Shin Koyama





thing almost somber, like a Mondrian painting. What we saw was more like a Paul Klee, only that Klee is often gloomy. Breuer and his art are happy.

"There was a magic about Breuer," continued Barnes, who does not approve of everything Breuer does today. "He had a flair in everything he touched and it was often unexpected. He would put a staircase on one side of a building, for instance, and you would expect a symmetrical one on the other side. But no, he would do something entirely different on the other side. It was not rational or logical. But his magic always worked. It was, and is, always absolutely right. Breuer is simply a virtuoso, like a piano player, and that is something you can't theorize about. For us at Harvard, he was a breath of fresh air."

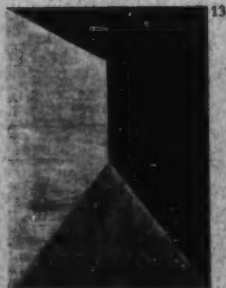
Very soon, the general public thought so. Every weekend, and often during the week as well, people would drive out to Lincoln, Massachusetts, to see the Gropius House and the Breuer House, the first modern houses on the East Coast (and perhaps the most sparkling works to come out of the Gropius-Breuer partnership that lasted from 1937 to 1941). Later, people went to see the houses Breuer built for himself in New Canaan, Connecticut, and for other clients elsewhere in New England. They were different, entirely different, from the glass and stucco boxes on the West Coast and those photographs from Europe in the architectural magazines. They had many familiar, indigenous features—wood sidings, brick and rough fieldstone walls, screened front porches, and fireplaces, Breuer's marvelous fireplaces. For here is another thing that occurred at Harvard. The new teachers from Europe revived America's appreciation of its own native building traditions, its own "intuitive sagacity," as Giedion put it. They also, by "rather devious retrospective means" (also Giedion's words), made us appreciate the structural forthrightness of the first Chicago School during the 1880's, Louis Sullivan, and, as I noted, Frank Lloyd Wright. Much of this retrospective appreciation, of course, was Giedion's own doing.

In 1946, Breuer established his own firm in New York. The virtuoso at last left the orchestra pit, went up on the stage, and played solo.

Breuer, I know, would want me to qualify this statement. He works closely with his associates—Herbert Beckhard, Robert F. Gatje, Hamilton P. Smith and Tician Papachristou. But these men would surely agree that the Breuer office is not a Budapest quintet, or even a team in the sense that some architects nowadays elevate into a matter of *Weltanschauung*. The Breuer associates have important responsibilities. They support Breuer's work in every respect. But it is his work. He plays his own music.

The first opportunity for a large-scale performance came in 1953 and was quite unexpected. Breuer happened to meet Eero Saarinen at the Café Deux Magots in Paris and Saarinen, who was on the advisory panel, told him that a headquarters building for UNESCO was being planned. Later, while motoring in Italy with his wife, Breuer received a telegram informing him that he was to design it. He did not believe it and continued on his trip, finding the official notification on his return two weeks later.

The UNESCO headquarters complex (with Pier Luigi Nervi and Bernard Zehruss) is probably the first modern government building to combine the office function of government with the representational prestige, the symbolism, that governmental palaces used to convey. In many respects, it is a summary of Breuer's previous work—the continuous balconies of his *Bauwelt* apartment house project, the Y-shape of the "Civic Center for the Future" office buildings, among others. But the summary is also a



new statement in itself, much enhanced, undoubtedly with Nervi's help, by a new, structural use of concrete, particularly in the trapezoid-shaped conference building. The building also shows what had previously seemed impossible: that modern architecture on a monumental scale can be brought into harmony even with the formal, classical planning and architecture of central Paris. Breuer has been praised for completing the semi-circle of the Place Fontenoy (which the building does only vaguely) and for keeping his building in the spirit of Gabriel's 18th century Ecole Militaire on the opposite side. But this, he says, was largely coincidence. He likes the thought, however, that his building, made of concrete and glass, and the result of international technology, has become so very much part of Paris.

From UNESCO, he rapidly progressed to a great variety of buildings that became ever bolder in form, ever more sculptural and dramatic, and ever more personal, too. "Structure," he has said, "is not just a means to a solution. It is also a principle and a passion." He seems happiest when he can indulge that passion on a grand scale, as in his addition to the Grand Coulee Dam, now under construction.

But here, as elsewhere—in the majesty of his architectural sculptures, such as the "banner" for his Abbey Church of St. John for the Benedictine monastery in Collegeville, Minnesota, the forceful tree columns of IBM-France at La Gaude; the brazenness of his Whitney Museum in New York City; and all the other works listed in this catalog—he has never let the passion carry him away from his principle. And his principle, I would venture, remains that architecture is not just passionate structure, it is not just large-scale sculpture. It is architecture and architecture is to reflect and help life. It must serve human needs.

What seems to guide his own sure hand in his recent work may be his cheerfully acknowledged fascination with Pharaonic architecture. "Our society, our beliefs, our methods, our culture," Breuer has written, "seem utterly different from those of ancient Egypt. The attraction their pyramids and monoliths and temples hold for us is, consequently, not easily explained by some interrelated trends of the social backgrounds."

"Could it be then that our relatively new admiration and curiosity for those ruins comes through a fascination with strange and mysterious things?"

"This is only part of the truth. It is also boldness and poesy inherent in large dimensions; physical size itself as an aesthetic fulfillment; no apology, no ornamental modulation; one continuous stone texture bound only by sky, rock, and sand; contrasts of surface, of form and of elements of elemental geometry—this is the architecture of ancient Egypt. Our contemporary work is nourished by comparable instincts."

To these instincts, Breuer has brought a great deal of ingenuity: His sculptural load bearing walls free his interiors of columns that spoil the chastity of curtain wall buildings, and much mechanical and plumbing equipment. Breuer tucks all these functions into sculptural form of his facades.

Or consider the ingenuity of a work that is quite legitimately pure sculpture, his design for the proposed memorial to Franklin D. Roosevelt in Washington. It is not just a monument, but an inspiring environment, a place that quickens your pulse. But where then is Roosevelt? In Breuer's design you would visualize the late President, not as rendered by an artist, but in a photographic image transferred on a block of granite in a three dimensional way. Breuer proposed to adapt the texture of halftone



12) The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1963-1966. Photo: Ezra Stoller
13) Resort town Flaine, H.S., France. Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gutie, 1960-. Photo: Yves Guillemot

14) U. of Mass., Campus Center, Amherst, Mass. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1965-1969. Photo: Ben Schnall
15) Stillman House, Litchfield, Conn. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1965. Photo: Joseph W. Molitor



engraving, the dots of various concentrations, on the stone surface. Close up, you would see only a design. From the distance you would get a faithful image of F.D.R.

Breuer once listed for Peter Blake all the ingredients that went into the design of his buildings. He ended up with "that intangible one percent which is art." I would say the percentage of his inventive art, of his unclassifiable creativity, is a great deal higher. But I submit to Breuer's judgment when he says: "Architecture seems worthy of notice only in proportion as it produces an effect on our senses, and our senses are strangers to rationalizing processes. It is the same whether this effect, which we can, if you like, call 'beauty,' has been created by an engineer or an artist: whether it is the result of what is called speculative research, or what is called intuition. I care nothing for any differentiation between these methods, but I care a great deal whether I feel at ease in the finished building."

One feels at ease in Breuer's buildings. And so, I am sure, will our grandchildren and their grandchildren.

But you can't pin a label on Marcel Breuer. He himself once tried to define his work. In the end, in the agony of search for a precise formulation, he came up with a poem, the first and only one he created with words. It reads:

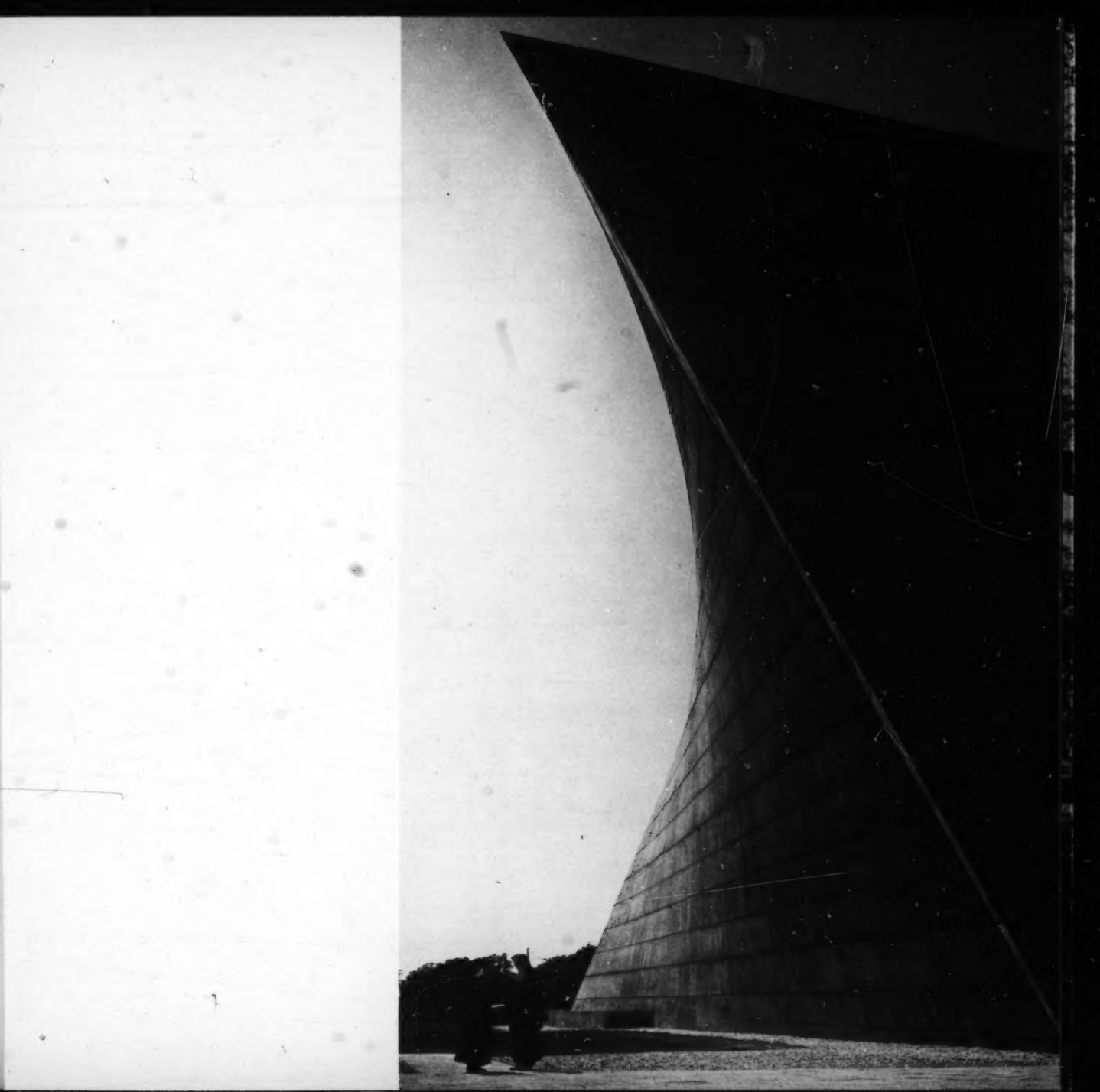
"Colors which you can hear with ears;
Sounds to see with eyes;
The void you touch with your elbows;
The taste of space on your tongue;
The fragrance of dimensions;
The juice of stone."

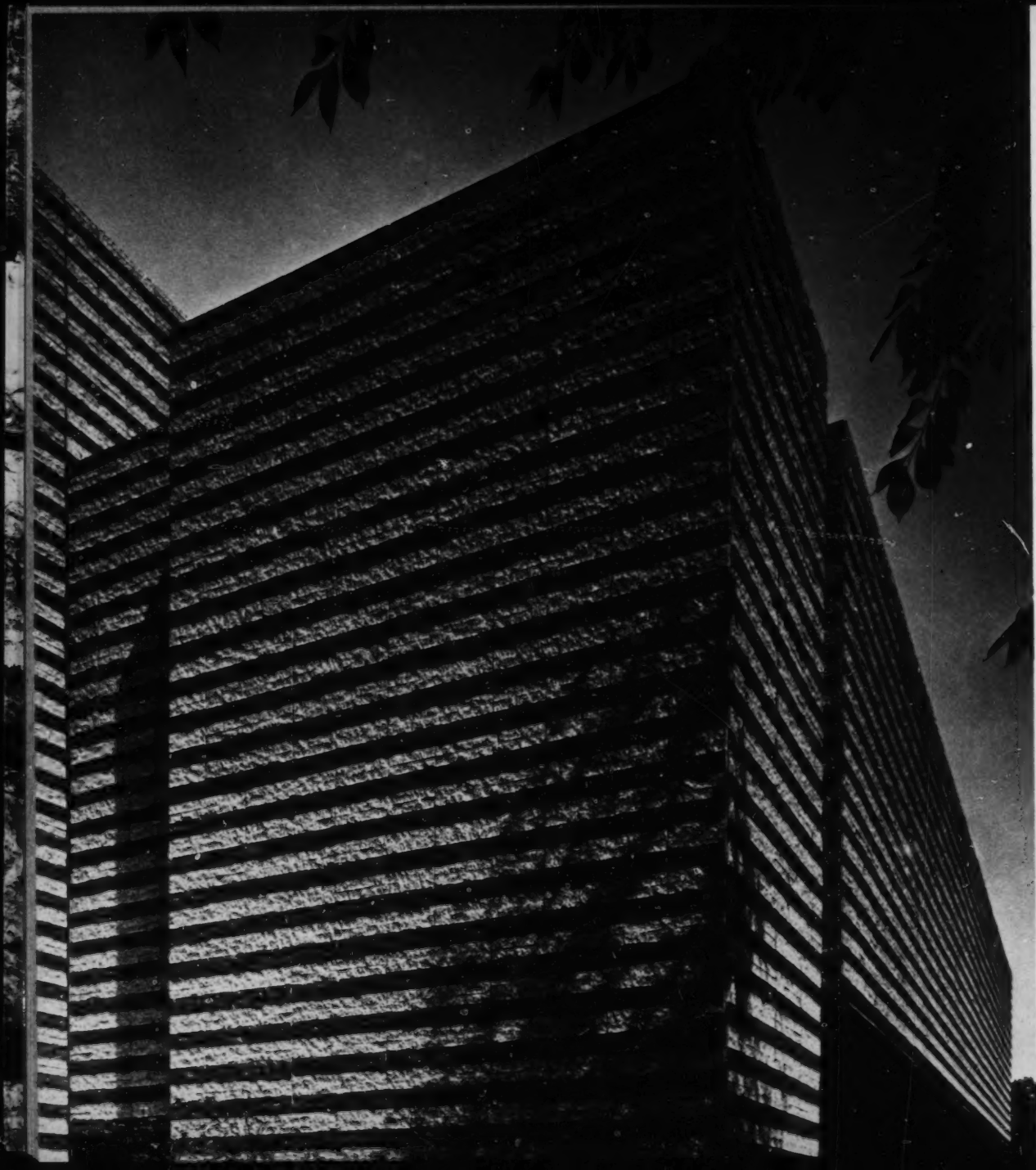
Large photographs in sequence:

- 1) St. Francis de Sales Church, Muskegon, Mich. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1961-1967. Photo: Hedrich-Blessing
- 2) The Cleveland Museum of Art, Education Wing, Marcel Breuer, Hamilton Smith, 1967-1970. Photo: Erol Akyavas
- 3) Neumann House, Croton-on-Hudson, N.Y. Marcel Breuer 1951-1953. Photo: Marcel Breuer
- 4) Koerfer House, Mosca, Switzerland, Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1963-1967. Photo: Kurt Blum
- 5) Resort town Flaine, H.S., France, Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gatje, 1960. Photo: Yves Guillemaut

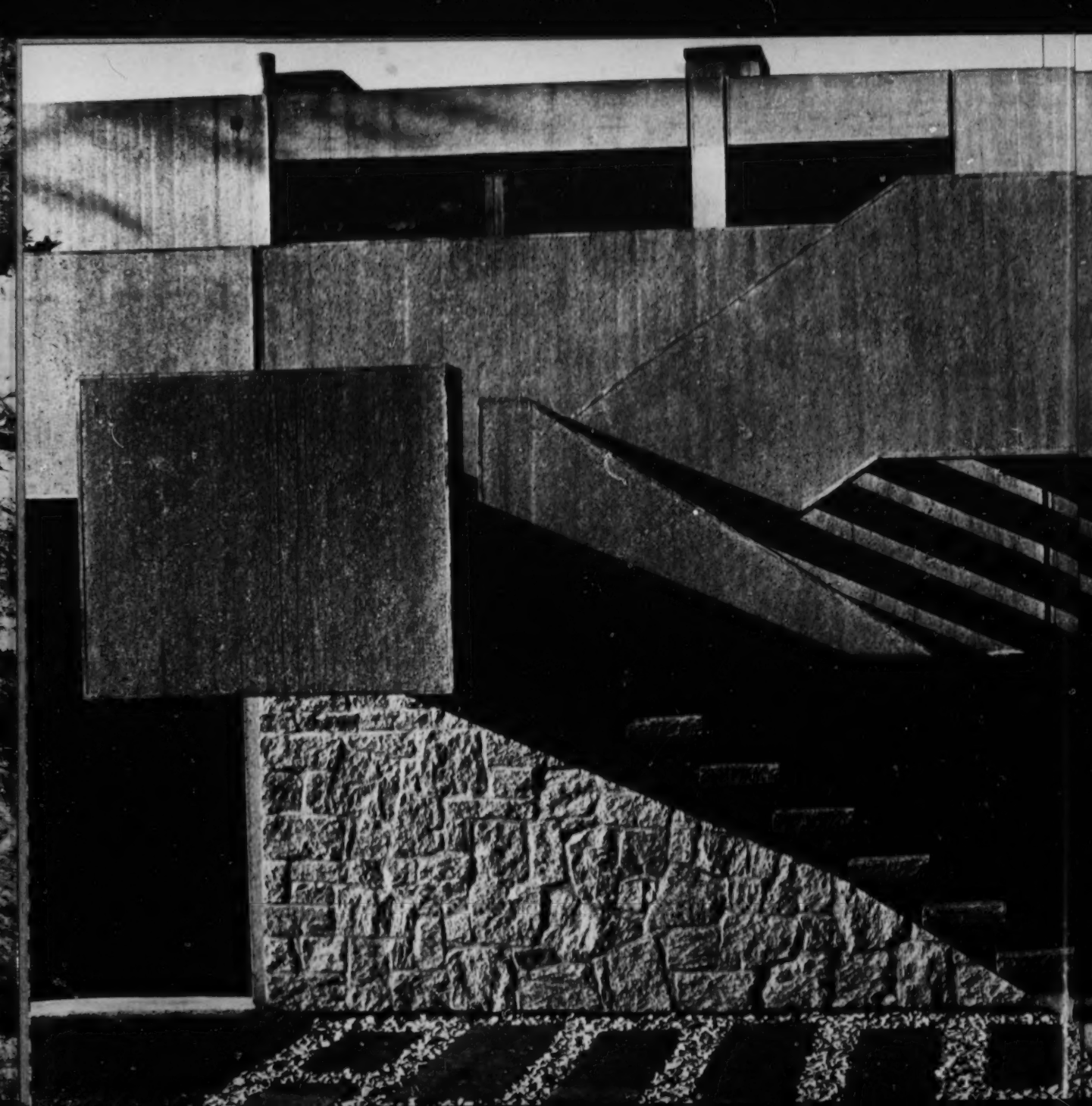
- 6) Headquarters for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Washington, D.C. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, Nolen-Swinburne and Associates, 1963-1968. Photo: Ben Schnall
- 7) U. of Mass., Campus Center, Amherst, Mass. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1963-1969. Photo: Ben Schnall
- 8) Resort town Flaine, H.S., France, Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gatje, 1960. Photo: Yves Guillemaut
- 9) New York University, Technology Building I, Bronx Campus, N.Y. Marcel Breuer; Hamilton P. Smith, associate, 1956-1961. Photo: Ben Schnall
- 10) The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1963-1966. Photo: Ezra Stoller

- 11) St. John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, Minn. Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1953-1968. Photo: Hedrich-Blessing
- 12) Torin Tech Center, Torrington, Conn. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1971. Photo: John Hill
- 13) IBM Complex, Boca Raton, Fla. Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gatje, 1967-1969. Photo: Joseph W. Molitor
- 14) U. of Mass., Campus Center, Amherst, Mass. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1963-1969. Photo: Fred Picker
- 15) The Cleveland Museum of Art, Education Wing, Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1967-1970. Photo: Courtesy, The Cleveland Plain Dealer

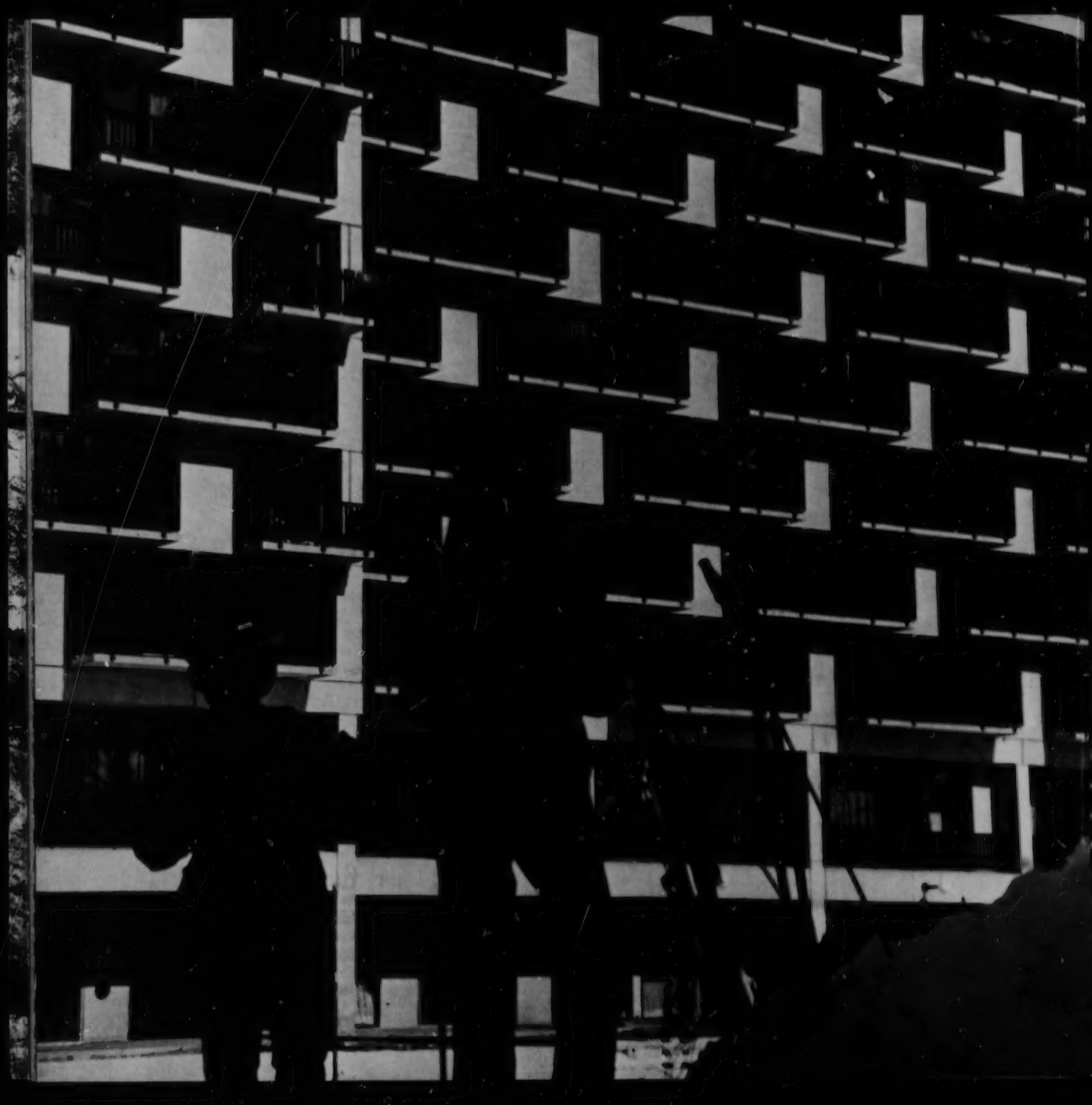


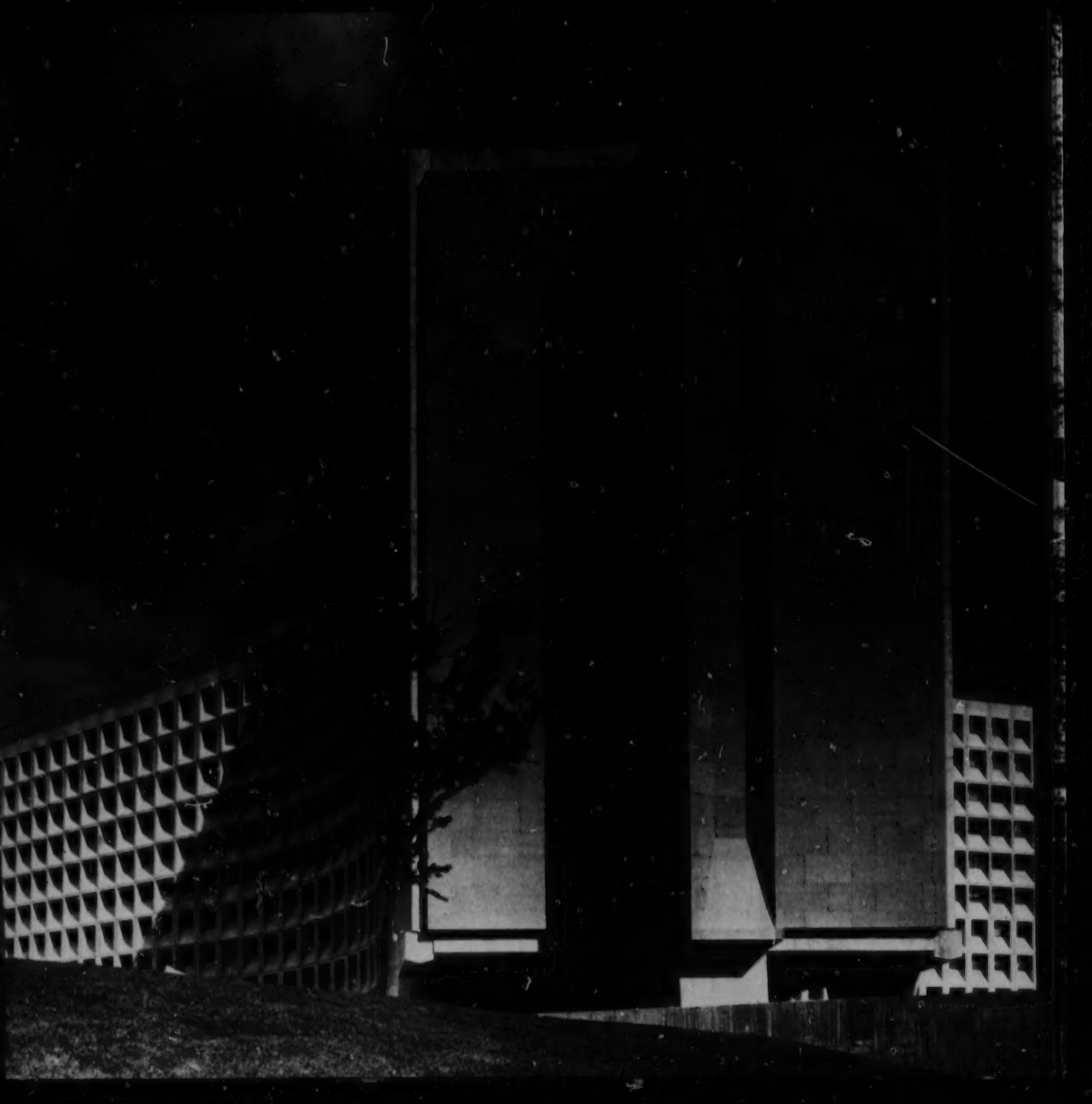


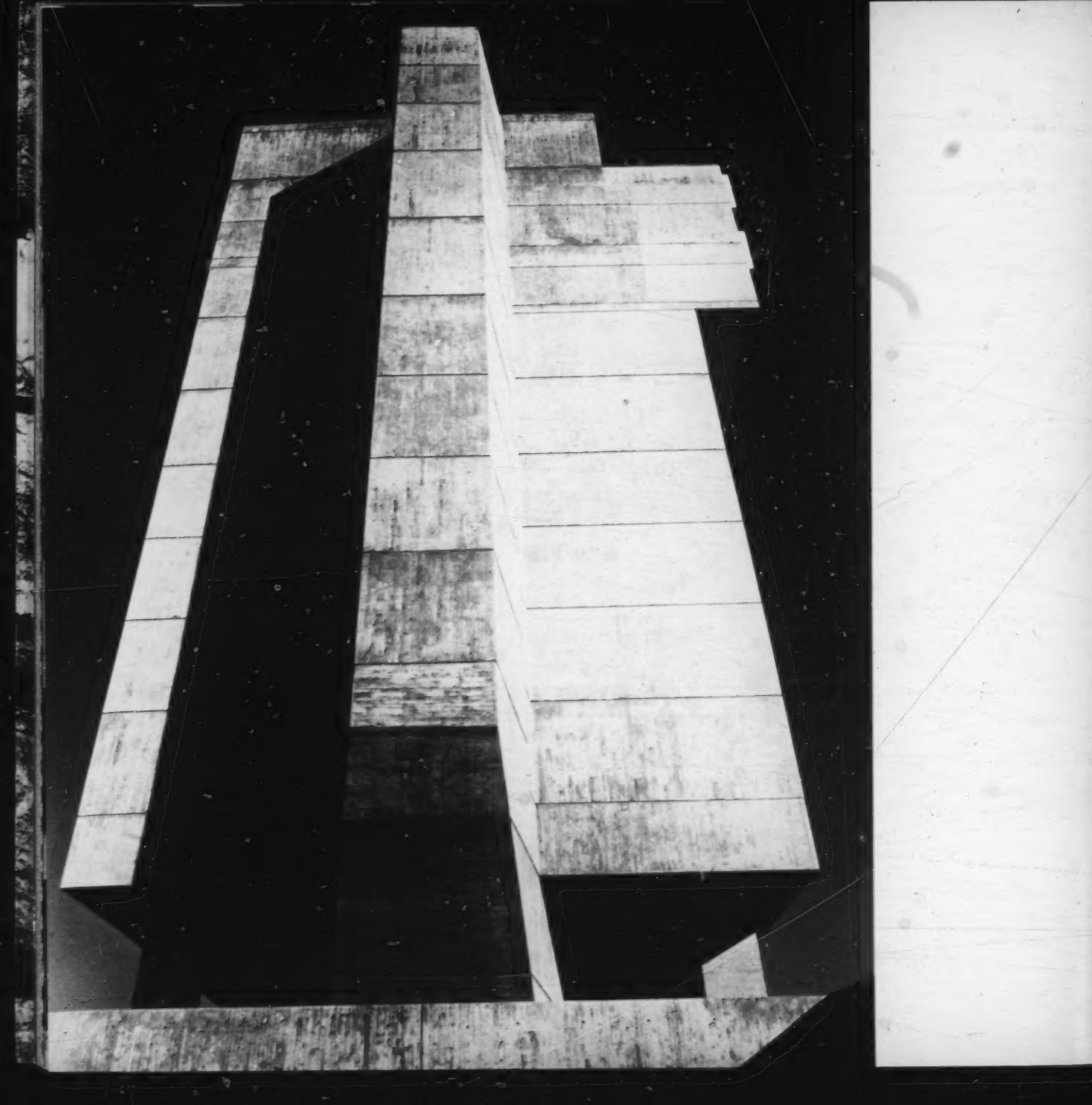




























Marcel Breuer must be placed among the few architects of the last fifty years who have grasped the new demands of our era and created the basic vocabulary to deal with them. It is gratifying to realize that this gentle, reflective humanist was present at the intellectual centers of architectural decision-making when some of the vital directions of contemporary architecture were being determined. Or, possibly, it is because he was there that some of the decisions took the forms they did.

It is worth recording some extravagant but totally documentable generalizations about Marcel Breuer. I know of no other architect with the total clarity of architectural vision that he has. His sensitivity to materials, their use, their texture, their tactile reality, their self-revelation under light and shadow have been written about frequently. It is the unity of his architecture that is so remarkable. His mastery of construction, detailing, clarity of plan and its spatial consequences is unique. His endless inventiveness within a disciplined and personal vocabulary have provided a language for many of his contemporaries and successors. The body of his work builds up to a massive testament of one man's impact on the visual world.

From his earliest project, Breuer's special sensitivity to form, to sophistication in detail have been apparent. The Harnischmacher House has a structural and polemical clarity that look as well today as they did a half century ago. His sportsman's club developed a new attitude toward interiors in which the space was architectural and the objects within it were shaped by an architect's sensibility.

His relationship with the Bauhaus has its own interesting complexities. First as a student, later as a master, he contributed to and learned from the immensely talented group that created, in a period of less than a decade, a complex but viable approach to building and philosophy. I once asked him what it was like to live among this community—Gropius, Klee, Kandinsky, Bayer, Albers, Itten, Meyer, and the rest. His answer, as closely as I can recall it, was "It was very exciting. But to have such excitement, you must be in a country that has just lost a war, where money has no value, where you do not know whether you will eat the next day. I would not want my son to go through it." However, he was there at the time, and his furniture, rooms, and larger architectural projects have a singular personal quality that already implies the keen individual decision-making that characterizes all of his work.

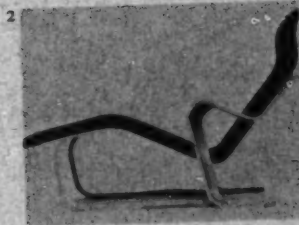
He spent some important years in England in the mid-thirties—when the focus for experimental architecture shifted from Germany to Britain. Breuer, as part of the MARS (Modern Architecture Research Society) group, was involved in this intensely creative but short-lived crystallization within the British world of architecture. His Isokon furniture and some advanced architectural studies were made in this period, some in association with F. R. S. Yorke.

When Gropius came to America in 1937 to bring his ideas to the Harvard Graduate School of Design, it marked the shift of the active center of architectural thinking to the United States. Shortly after he arrived, he brought Breuer over from England to teach with him and, soon, to open an office in partnership with him. For years a new vocabulary in residential design was developed, based on the American building method of stud design rather than post and beam. The Hagerty House, a seaside house in Cohasset, and the Chamberlain House in Wayland epitomize the sophisticated, delightful series of houses that were produced from their Cambridge office.

**A VIEW OF
MARCEL BREUER
BY
RICHARD G. STEIN**



- 1) New York University, Dormitory and Community Center, Bronx Campus, N.Y. Marcel Breuer; Robert F. Gatje, associate, 1956-1961. Photo: Ben Schnall
- 2) "Isokon" reclining chair. Marcel Breuer, 1932-35
- 3) The Cleveland Museum of Art, Education Wing. Marcel Breuer, Hamilton P. Smith, 1967-1970. Photo: C. W. Ackerman
- 4) St. John's Abbey Church, Collegeville, Minn. Marcel Breuer; Hamilton P. Smith, associate, 1953-1958. Photo: Hedrich-Blessing
- 5) UNESCO Headquarters, Paris. Marcel Breuer, P. L. Nervi, B. Zehrliuss, 1953-1958



In the late twenties and thirties he designed and had built a remarkable series of chairs and tables—from the well-known bent tubular chairs and the laminated plywoods to those in extruded aluminum. When he came to Cambridge in 1937, he brought with him two small marbled cardboard file boxes with loose-leaf rings inside. One was labeled *Stahlmöbel*—steel furniture, the other *Holzöbel*—wood furniture. There were forty or fifty drawings in each, representing a dictionary of every conceivable intelligent use of tubular steel and plywood. While he reused the designs and still does, he immediately thought up several new families of rattan and cutout plywood, and designed furniture adapted to American power tools.

At the outset of World War II, Marcel Breuer moved his office to New York and for some years produced additional fine houses, but was really marking time, waiting to apply his talent to larger commissions. These began to appear in the late forties and have steadily increased in number and scope. Interestingly enough, the clients have been primarily industrial and institutional. Office buildings, schools, the UNESCO building (with Zehruss and Nervi), government buildings, the Whitney and other museums, buildings for religious orders, and factory buildings have formed the bulk of his practice. In Europe, he has designed some resort buildings and apartments but there have been few such buildings in the United States.

The personal quality and consistency of his office's work merits special analysis. What accounts for the diversity within controlled limits of such strong buildings as St. John's Abbey, the IBM buildings, the Cleveland Museum, the NYU dormitories, and the Flaine ski area? Working with a group of creative partners, Breuer has still managed to maintain an unmistakable control over the work of his office, a control that must exist purely because of the strength and clarity of Breuer's own ideas. Years ago, when I worked in his office, I felt that it was an ideal model for any architect concerned with the architectural product entrusted to him. When he brought in a design to be developed into a set of construction documents, it was a pleasure to see how perfectly every component fell into place—the plan, the structure, the details, the use of materials, the space ambience, the relation to its site—everything. This, in fact, is the secret of the discipline that characterizes the office of this gentle, warm architect.

There is more to say—about his generosity, his concern for people as people, and his perception and humor. But all of these attitudes have found their way into his buildings, which, after all, are fitting vessels for containing them.



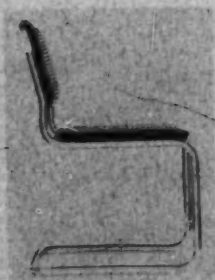
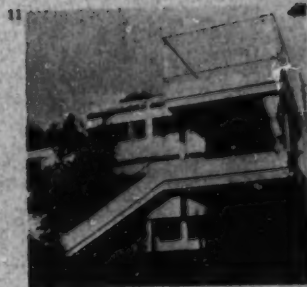
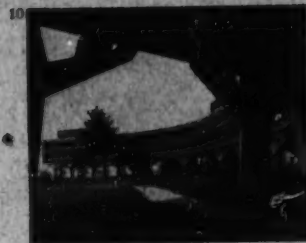
6) House for a Sportsman, Berlin Exhibition. Marcel Breuer, 1931

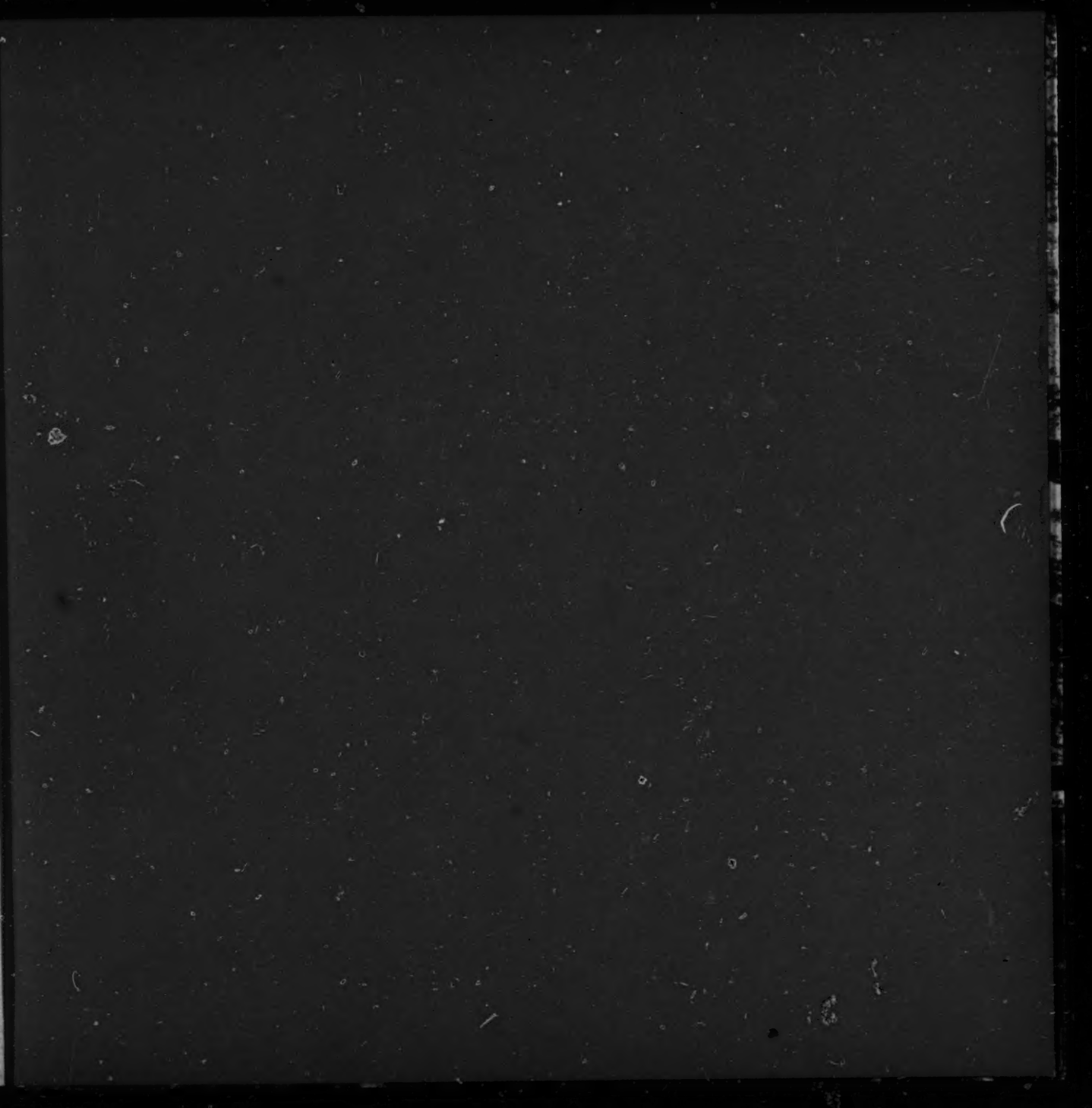
7) Torin Administration Building, Torrington, Conn. Marcel Breuer, Herbert Beckhard, 1963-1966. Photo: Ben Schnall





- 8) Glass table. Marcel Breuer, 1928
 9) Side chair. Marcel Breuer, 1926-1928
 10) IBM Research Center, La Gaudie, Var, France. Marcel Breuer; Robert F. Gaije, associate, 1960-1961. Photo: Peter E. Fischer
 11) Harnischmacher House, Wiesbaden, Germany. Marcel Breuer, 1932
 12) Aluminum reclining chair. Marcel Breuer, 1933
 13) Resort town Flaine, H.S., France. Marcel Breuer, Robert F. Gaije, 1960. Photo: Yves Guillemot





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